The Conversion of Non-Catholics in the United States

The Major Mission Problem Today with Suggested Methods of Fulfilling this Apostolate

by
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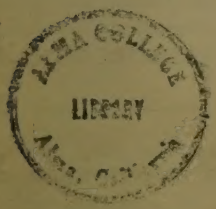

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"YET NOT FOR THESE ONLY DO I PRAY, BUT FOR THOSE ALSO WHO THROUGH THEIR WORD ARE TO BELIEVE IN ME, THAT ALL MAY BE ONE, EVEN AS THOU, FATHER, IN ME AND I IN THEE; THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US"

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1.
An Unfinished Task

"I will help the non-Catholic with my right hand and the Catholic with my left." Thus did Father Hecker, the founder of the Paulists, quaintly refer to a stubborn, challenging fact that must be of concern to every Catholic in the United States. This country is not a Catholic land. Nor can it be designated a Christian land without numerous disquieting qualifications. At an awesome moment in our history—when for the good of religion and the defense of Christian civilization, the whole world looks to us for succor and leadership—our nation is unable to bring to her dominant role the full light and strength of the Catholic Faith. Despite the undeniably prodigious accomplishment of American Catholics, we have neither converted our country nor have we conspicuously advanced a wider evangelization among its non-Catholics.

EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Lest there be the slightest ambiguity, the writer profoundly believes that there is no justification for a selfish parochialism or an exclusive nationalism in one's mission outlook. He sincerely hopes that the time will soon be past when the claims of the field afar need to be defended. He equally trusts that few will question the mission axiom that blessings on the home apostolate are granted in proportion to our sensitiveness for the needs of the foreign missions.[1]

This having been said, it needs to be emphasized that the Church is confronted with a major mission problem in our own United States.[2] It stares us in the face in all our communities. And

1. Rev. George C. Powers, *The Maryknoll Movement*, pp. 44-45, 63.
2. Is Ours a Missionary Country? Rev. Paul Hanly Furfey, *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Jan. 1949.

many of us must contend with this problem in the intimacy of our family circle.

Item one: Out of some 140,000,000 persons residing in this country 27,000,000 are members of the Catholic Church.

Item two: Considerably over half our fellow citizens do not regularly attend any church whatsoever.

Item three: Faced with this gigantic evidence of religious ignorance, indifference, or unbelief, we are winning some 117,000 converts annually.

Item four: Numerous priests, signally close to the problem, estimate that the leakage more than offsets our gains through conversion.

One-third of the counties that make up this nation (an area as large as Mexico with a population equal to that of Canada) do not shelter a single resident priest. In Georgia, for example, there are a total of 160 counties and 144 of them are without a resident priest. The Church in North Carolina presents a particularly disturbing cross-section of our local mission problem. In length it is comparable to the distance between New York and Cincinnati; in width it is about the distance from Chicago to Detroit. And scattered over this vast area there are but 16,000 Catholics.

While conditions are considerably more encouraging in many of our metropolitan areas, these populous centers—without exception—present us with manifest and urgent missionary obligations. Those involved in heresy or schism, unbelievers, the un-churched, lapsed Catholics—these abound all too plentifully in nearly every city parish. There is hardly a solitary community in the nation where their number may be considered negligible. When the Paulists opened Information Centers in Boston and Baltimore, one friendly observer politely questioned their utility. "These cities are largely Catholic already," he said, "you will hardly attract a corporal's guard." Yet the ever increasing crowds that approached these centers abundantly justified their necessity, and immediately required larger staffs than were at first planned for them. A more vivid consciousness of the state of religion in our land must impel us to echo the observation of the late Bishop Joseph M. Corrigan: "The sporadic nature of convert-making in this country cannot be said to be an adequate response to the Master's call for souls."[3]

3. The *Missionary Union of the Clergy Bulletin*, Sept. 1939, p. 20.

While there have always been individual priests among us who were exceptionally devoted to convert-making—many of them personally receiving more than a thousand converts—we have, generally speaking, been more conscious of the "fold" than of the "field." But in this respect conditions are rapidly improving. The writer is in a position to know that there exists a growing body of seminarians and priests who are being ever more deeply inspired by Christ's commands: "Go forth . . . Preach the Gospel to every creature," "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold." Among them is discernible a greater awareness that every priest is an apostle by vocation. They recognize that while they must perform a work of preservation among Catholics, they must also perform a labor of spiritual conquest among non-Catholics. They must know how to use the hook of the fisherman as well as the crook of the shepherd, and should not permit the burdens of administration to obscure the larger claims of the apostolate. "Ordinaries of places and parish priests," says the Code of Canon Law: 1350, "shall regard non-Catholics residing in their dioceses and parishes as commended to their care in the Lord."

Aside from the supernatural resources, which are the primary sources of our confidence that our country will ultimately be converted to the Faith, our natural resources are truly enormous. Few secular organizations can command anything like the reserves in our possession. Fifteen thousand centrally located parishes; 42,000 devoted and highly trained clerics; and 27,000,000 loyal lay people! These huge advantages give us little excuse for hesitancy or timidity.

Furthermore, we labor among a people whose language and culture we share; whose political philosophy owes its greatest debt to Catholic theology and philosophy. While religious ignorance, bigotry and indifference are all too prevalent, we do command immense good will among our fellow citizens. We are at liberty to worship, and free to explain ourselves by every legitimate avenue of communication. And we go to people who usually have a strong sense of fair play, who are generous in mind and sympathies, and who are independent in their thinking and judgments. We cannot but deplore the evidence of materialism, secularism and the waning Christianity among them, but we constantly encounter unsuspected depths of latent religion even among the un-churched and the

skeptics. Many a missionary has gone to a people with vastly less to commend them than the non-Catholics of the United States.

Moreover, the present mood of many non-Catholics in our land invites our ardent zeal. They have witnessed persistent and formidable threats to all the deeper values they hold dear. The false philosophies in which they reposed such naive confidence have ended in disaster and many are horrified at the consequences. Consciously or unconsciously, they are groping for the ultimate principles that give meaning to existence, dignity and peace to the individual and security to society. Out of his own rich experience in convert-making, Msgr. Sheen remarks: "The world is passing through a crisis, or a judgment on the way it has lived and thought and acted . . . and it is through a catastrophe that many are finding their way back to God."[4]

THE NEED OF GOOD METHODS

Conversion is both a divine mystery and a practical problem, that is to say, it is both a supernatural and a natural work. It is partly the labor of God and partly the result of human activity. Because it is so largely a mystery and a work of grace, we must always remember that no ripened wisdom, cultivated talent or superior technique will ever of itself induce men to believe. The veteran convert-maker is second only to the theologian in ascribing his conquests more to prayer and sacrifice than to any of the external activities of his apostolate. This is holy ground indeed, and without the operation of divine grace our labors are destined to sterility and disappointment.

Nevertheless God does enlist our cooperation in the spread of His Kingdom. He calls us to till the soil, sow a seed, and gather the harvest that grows under the influence of His grace. God, therefore, expects us to bring to our efforts our highest intelligence and best capacity. The great missionary saints were not only men of exuberant enthusiasm and intrepid courage; they were skilled technicians, men who had mastered the fundamental principles of their craft. They devised a strategic plan and the tactical instruments to make contacts with souls, remove misunderstanding, generate interest, and bring conviction to the hearts and minds of men. Zeal

4. *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 250.

alone is never enough. Good intentions, initiative, and energy are all requisite, but they can be disastrous when misguided. A blundering and inept approach to individuals or to a nation might only precipitate antagonism and bring failure to a noble cause.

The American clergy are blessed with deep faith and quick intelligence. When once convinced of the necessity of some activity, they are not slow to master the technicalities that govern its operation and give best assurance of ultimate success. So far as convert work is concerned, I think that two significant facts will be noted even by the casual observer. First, the clergy of our country are coming to regard convert work less as an occasional task, and more as one of the regular, ordinary activities of their everyday work. Secondly, with this growing concern for converts, there goes a desire to learn and apply the most approved methods of winning our Separated Brethren to the Faith. In this brochure the major emphasis, of necessity, must be placed on the more basic procedures that can be applied in any parish. For those who desire to pursue this subject in greater detail, attention is called to the monthly release "Techniques For Convert-Makers," 411 West 59th St., New York.

2.

Preliminary Approaches to Convert-Making

St. Augustine, describing the early influence exercised upon him by St. Ambrose, remarks, "I came to love him, not at first as a teacher of the truth, which I had utterly despaired of finding in Your church, *but for his kindness towards me.*" It might well be noted that, even with a philosopher like St. Augustine, the missioner frequently has no message until he wins a friend. And before large-scale conversions are effected in our country the clergy must establish friendly contact and cordial relations with as many non-Catholics as they can. Large numbers of non-Catholics will be reached and their dispositions towards the Church improved, if each priest is alert to turn his daily opportunities to good advantage.

A priest enjoys immense prestige in most of our communities.[1] Though they see him at a distance and too infrequently, many non-Catholics are eager to meet him and know him better. They seldom take the initiative; they usually wait for the priest to make the first advance. But they are quick to voice their inner needs or difficulties at the first sign of priestly interest or solicitude. In the course of the day, each priest meets many non-Catholics. He consults professional men, business people and civic leaders. He meets others on sick calls, socially, or just in passing. Some of them even come to the rectory. However casual the meeting, the apostle is face to face with a potential friend, an ally and possibly a catechumen. If the priest is approachable and manifests genuine personal interest, it won't be long before the non-Catholic raises questions in which the Church is involved. Father Viéban, the saintly Sulpician, thought highly of these casual contacts. He often remarked that he never met a non-Catholic without trying to make him better disposed towards the Church.

We are often presented with an opportunity as well as a responsibility when a well-disposed non-Catholic comes to arrange for a marriage with a Catholic. "Since a certain number of mixed marriages is inevitable," said Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, "the difficulty ought to be faced, not only deplored. So many non-Catholics preparing for marriage with Catholics, if they are approached in the right manner and handled tactfully, can be won for the Faith that a cause of great harm to the Church might almost become a real factor in her growth." Many dioceses require a minimum of instruction for the non-Catholic partner, and some priests wisely endeavor to persuade such persons to take the full course in the catechism. This removes prejudice, imparts needed religious instruction, and either converts the non-Catholic or prepares for his conversion. The instructor might capitalize on the friendship thus formed by an occasional visit after the marriage, or by a note of greeting on appropriate occasions. A pastor in Peoria likes to relate how a postcard, written on his vacation, finally dissolved the resistance of a man who had long hindered his wife and children in the practice of the Faith.

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1. Attracting Prospective Converts, John T. McGinn, C.S.P., *Techniques for Convert-Makers*, May, 1948.

GROUP CONTACTS

Since it is utterly impossible to meet each and every non-Catholic in our parishes, many successful convert-makers endeavor to reach large groups through the various service organizations to which they belong. The Red Cross, luncheon and professional men's clubs, and associations representing labor, veterans and the like, provide fairly easy access to large sections of the local population. They usually welcome the Catholic pastor, and through them he can reach many individuals and large groups with his influence. A prominent convert-maker in Pennsylvania attributes his success to the acceptance, years ago, of an invitation to address a club of professional and business men. He first talked to twenty-five people. But he later became one of their favorite lecturers and often addressed three hundred people, who frequently kept him until midnight answering religious questions.

Not all of these groups are equally accessible or important, and a priest needs circumspection in his dealings with them, but they sometimes offer the shortest routes to wide contact with many communities. In line with this procedure, every priest should be alert to render encouragement and cooperation towards plans that further civic improvements, and no public celebration (unless political in character) should be complete without him. In all that is compatible with Catholic principle and priestly decorum he should be eager to lend his aid.

It ought to be realized that non-Catholics are often in attendance at our services, and many more would come if they felt they were welcome. Funerals, weddings, parish anniversaries, Christmas and Easter services—these are but a few of the occasions when many non-Catholics will be found scattered through our congregations. To improve their dispositions, many priests provide booklets that explain the service, extend a warm greeting and invite them to return. When a sermon is preached they prepare conscientiously, selecting a topic that may give immediate spiritual help and solid instruction on some fundamental Christian doctrine. Such an experience is often the first step on the path of many a convert to Rome.

DIRECT APPROACHES

Some priests are not content to reach the "other sheep" obliquely

or as a kind of by-product of their ministry to Catholics. They reach out directly for converts. They employ the non-Catholic mission (either as a course of lectures or as a series of dialogues), the open forum, the inquiry class, the trailer mission (especially in the country district), or street preaching. Father Bertrand L. Conway, C.S.P., distinguished proponent of the non-Catholic mission, definitely established the fact that a direct appeal to non-Catholics by services specifically designed for them is four times as effective as any indirect appeal.

Considering the influence of the radio on public opinion, a priest should not ignore the possibilities of a radio program from some local station. Many of the smaller stations are eager to allot free broadcasting time upon application. Extensive audiences, composed of people inaccessible to any other Catholic approach, can be reached in the privacy of their homes and thereby guided to the truths of the Faith. Bishop Hunt, at Salt Lake City, has been conspicuously successful in this apostolate, and has accomplished immense good over a wide area.

The printed word is, of course, a major missionary vehicle. The Catholic Faith is admirably presented in innumerable books and pamphlets, but only a trickle of this output actually reaches the hands of non-Catholics. Each priest can do his part by suggesting Catholic periodicals and reference works for the local library, and by arranging for the donation of these works if the library budget is slim. He can provide a pamphlet rack in his own church, and can mail timely brochures on occasions to leading non-Catholics. One priest of my acquaintance has compiled a mailing list of the town's leading citizens, the non-Catholic partner in mixed marriages and others who have evidenced interest in the Church. To them he frequently mails pamphlets or mimeograph copies of articles on the Catholic side of questions that engage public attention.

Of course, no priest should stop short with the preliminary labor outlined here. But neither should he permit weariness or discouragement to deter him from this essential introductory effort. For it is only when we have removed hindrances and fostered good will that we create the atmosphere where sympathetic observers of the Church and eager inquirers will be on the increase.

3.

In Inquiry Class

Notwithstanding the numbers of people more or less interested in the Church in every locality, many parishes give little or no indication that we are eager to welcome inquirers. Because of this lack of an established procedure for facilitating their instruction, many non-Catholics hesitate to approach our rather forbidding rectory doorbells. To rectify this deficiency, many priests in widely different types of parishes have instituted the inquiry class. There is nothing novel about this form of group instruction.[1] It is simply an adaptation of the time-honored Catechumenate and is almost universally employed in the foreign missions. It commends itself for two distinct advantages.

ADVANTAGES

First, it is an attractive, standing, definite invitation to any non-Catholic by which he may improve his knowledge of Catholicism. There is nothing vague or haphazard about it. The time is set, the place is prepared, and the instructor is there to welcome all who come. It applies to the field of convert work the principles of regularity and easy accessibility which priests habitually employ in all their public parochial activities. It enables a priest to meet any inquirer half way, whether that person is only mildly interested or nearly ripe for conversion. By creating the conditions which make it comparatively easy to take instructions, the group plan persuades people to study our doctrines who otherwise might never have done so.

Secondly, the inquiry class makes possible a really ambitious convert apostolate without excessive encroachments on a priest's

1. "A Parochial Plan for Converts," John T. McGinn, C.S.P., *Techniques for Convert-Makers*, March, 1947.

other duties or needed leisure. By careful foresight even a hard-pressed pastor can arrange two evenings a weeks for this most vital labor. St. Patrick justified his mission method in Ireland by saying, "We had to spread our nets wide." And priests in our country, dissatisfied with the relative fewness of our converts and eager to improve the situation, are convinced that the inquiry class is the best procedure for spreading *our* nets wide.

LAUNCHING THE CLASS

In planning such a class, a priest takes into account the character of his community and the dispositions of its people.[2] He chooses two evenings a week at a time and place that will best suit the convenience of his prospects. The number of those who ultimately enroll will depend upon how well he publicizes the course. Advertising mediums generally include: Sunday Mass announcements; the parish bulletin; advertisements in the diocesan paper and in the daily press, along with news items in both; hand bills; a poster in the vestibule of the church, and another outside to attract passersby. Some of these announcements will attract non-Catholics directly, while others will reach the Catholic laity who in turn will invite interested non-Catholics of their acquaintance. It is solidly established that most of our catechumens come at the invitation of the Catholic laity.

The first meeting, especially in small communities, may not attract a large gathering, but persevering application will improve the attendance in time. This initial gathering is always of exceptional importance. First impressions are usually lasting, and many inquirers will come with some misgivings. However, if the instructor is genial and sympathetic he will gradually dispel any wisps of alarm, and will soon establish a relationship of friendliness and confidence.

He ought to make it abundantly clear that his purpose is to present objectively, the basic teachings and practices of the Church; that there will be no fee for the course; and that no previous intention of joining the Church is mandatory. He will do well to indicate the need of God's illuminating and inspiring grace; to encourage daily prayers; and to invite all to join in the simple prayers that open and terminate each class. Incidentally, he should

2. "The Beginning of an Inquiry Class," W. J. Grace, S.J., *Techniques for Convert-Makers*, October, 1947.

be tireless in soliciting the prayers of his friends and parishioners for the success of his project. He promises to elucidate one fundamental topic each evening, and welcomes questions that bear on it. Questions on other topics he engages to answer before or after each class. At such times he ought to provide books and pamphlets that supplement the lessons. Each catechumen ought to receive a copy of the catechism and study it at leisure. However, the instructor himself may find it more effective to incline towards the lecture form.

A library card containing pertinent information about each inquirer is indispensable. It should include: name, address, telephone, religious affiliation; whether baptized or not, married or single, married validly or invalidly; and any previous marriage. This record may also indicate the nature of the difficulties encountered, literature borrowed, any insight gained regarding the inquirer's disposition and progress, and the lectures attended or missed.

Some individual instruction is always requisite. By means of the class it is possible to cover the fundamentals of the Catholic religion. But each inquirer will have personal problems and difficulties that necessitate individual attention. In addition, there are lessons that are unavoidably missed and these eventually have to be made up. If the instructor is on hand before and after each class and endeavors to keep in close touch with each neophyte, he can help them with their personal difficulties and arrange for private interviews when these are necessary or desirable. Advocates of the inquiry class thus combine group instruction with whatever degree of private coaching is necessary. This was the method followed by our Lord Himself. He taught huge multitudes and smaller groups, and then searched out or made Himself accessible to individuals as often as need arose.

RESULTS

The writer recently received the convert statistics of one parish covering a span of twenty years. In the first ten-year period, during which time no special efforts were made to attract inquirers and when those who came on their own initiative received private instruction, 195 converts were won. In the second ten-year period, the inquiry class was established and publicized widely, and 600 converts were received. Wherever the group instruction plan has been inaugurated and conducted with competence and perseverance, a similar improvement has been reported. Outstanding in the use of

this technique is the diocese of Brooklyn with fifty conveniently located centers where annual courses are conducted.

A few non-Catholics will attend a class or two merely out of curiosity and then discontinue. But of those who complete the course, considerably over half will come into the Church immediately, even though they had no such intention when they started. Others delay for a time because of indecision or the opposition of associates, but they are received shortly afterwards. With still others, the gift of Faith may be long delayed, but if the priest assures these people of his continued regard and is unfailing in patience and helpfulness, they may still be won.

4.
The Role of the Laity

Every day the ranks of the unconverted in our country are penetrated by twenty-six million lay Catholics. People who deliberately ignore or somehow miss our many attempts at religious reconciliation, must constantly hobnob with Catholic laymen. How often are the clergy present when non-Catholics discuss religion or voice their spiritual perplexities? Provoked by a popular book or magazine article which slurs the Church, the fair-minded non-Catholic will sometimes seek an explanation—but not usually from a priest. He will question his Catholic business associate, Catholic neighbor or friend. At other times he will confide in a Catholic acquaintance regarding some personal disappointment or sorrow. Often he will refer to the bewildering, ominous problems of this atomic age, most of which have their moral or spiritual implications. These are the occasions when a man is most likely to be impressed with the necessity of religion and the secure position of the Church. If the layman he consults is tactful and able to give an intelligent answer, the non-Catholic is likely to regard the Catholic Church with deeper and more favorable attention.

Now is this vast potential of twenty-six million lay apostles being realized in our campaign to convert America?[1] Hardly. While many laymen exhibit zeal and proficiency in capitalizing on their daily contacts with non-Catholics, it remains true that the average

Catholic does little to promote conversions. John Moody, the distinguished American convert, gives evidence of this dismal fact when he writes: "Too many lay Catholics seem to go through life tacitly assuming that if a man is not a Catholic, he never will be one. Even if he shows active interest and asks questions, their impulse is to change the subject as quickly as possible . . . I do not remember that any lay Catholic to whom I ever broached the subject displayed any particular interest or seemed anxious to help me."

There are various reasons for this inaction of the laity. Personal apathy, indifference, or even tepidity in their own religious duties quenches the ardor of some. Others are rendered speechless by human respect, or the unwritten agreement among certain types of people that religion as a subject of conversation is taboo. But if the laity tend to relegate most works of zeal to the clergy, it is mostly because they are unaware how much their assistance is needed, or because they have never been sufficiently trained to undertake a fruitful apostolate. Lay Catholics cannot be expected to rise above the level of the instruction received from the pulpit and in Catholic schools. They must be taught that Confirmation, while it makes a man strong in his faith, also commissions him to communicate a knowledge and appreciation of that faith to others. Pius XI, referring to the layman's duty to spread the faith, said: "To do nothing is a sin of omission, and it may be extremely grave."[2]

THE PERSONAL APOSTOLATE

Once the laity realize their obligation, one aspect of zeal which can be recommended to them is the personal apostolate. This embraces prayer, good example, sympathy for non-Catholics, and a willingness to answer their occasional queries about the Church—in a word, all the good works an individual Catholic can perform for his non-Catholic friends and acquaintances with a view to their ultimate conversion. The personal apostolate does not rank in importance with official Catholic Action, but it is an indispensable aid in winning converts. Three out of every four converts received by the writer were introduced by laymen. Frequently the laity had not only answered the non-Catholic's early questions, but had also

1. Enlisting Our Laity for Convert Work, Rev. John A. O'Brien, *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, May, 1949.
2. Speech to the Directors of Apostleship of Prayer, Sept. 29, 1927.

patiently nurtured a tenuous interest or vagrant curiosity until it ripened into a desire for systematic instruction. The widest variety of circumstances presented opportunities to awaken interest, remove misunderstanding, or increase respect for the Catholic Church. A contemplated marriage or one already contracted with an exemplary Catholic, a death in the family, an item in the news referring to the Church, a casual expression of curiosity, the occasion of a Catholic or non-Catholic mission—these and other situations were eagerly grasped and turned to good account. There is no adult Catholic who does not often meet with similar opportunities. They arise spontaneously. Catholics need only be aware of their missionary obligation and quick to recognize the appropriate time and manner for its exercise.

The technique to be followed in the personal apostolate will vary with the needs of individuals and changing circumstances.[8] However, the following directions make up a rule of thumb which it may be profitable to call to the laity's attention:

1. When a religious question arises, state the Catholic position as clearly as possible. If the Church's stand is unknown or obscure to you, it is far better to admit ignorance than to give even slightly erroneous information. In either case, investigate the question involved, and seek an early occasion to amplify your original remarks. This should be done quite casually. Easy does it.
2. If the inquirer is willing, present him with a carefully selected article, pamphlet, or book on the topic. It is best to offer reading with which you yourself are familiar and which added to your own understanding of the subject. Continue to supply literature as long as the person's interest is sustained.
3. Pray daily for the conversion of this person.
4. If he shows progress, invite and accompany him to a Catholic Church or service. This always represents a great advance. The Eucharistic Christ will bless him and he will never again be quite the stranger he was.
5. In time, introduce the inquirer to an understanding priest. If there is an inquiry class in the locality, persuade him to

3. The Laity and Convert-Making, John T. McGinn, C.S.P., *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, November, 1947.

enroll and accompany him at least to the opening lecture.

One all-important footnote must be added. Tact, which is a part of Christian charity, must pervade our entire approach to non-Catholics. Without tact, the cleverest answers and the most cogent apologetics may do more harm than good. The lay apostle who exhibits improper timing, a belligerent spirit, or impatience may cause many a sincere non-Catholic to abandon interest in the Catholic Church for the rest of his life.

ENLISTING THE LAITY

To recruit lay apostles for these tasks is far less difficult than it may seem. The first call will go out to our existing parish societies. They constitute a reservoir of devoted and capable talent which can be channeled into convert work. Besides subsidizing local publicity and providing for a library, the various groups often vie with one another in attracting inquirers.

It is a mistake to rely exclusively on a few faithful "stand-bys" among the laity. The full momentum of the entire parish is required if best results are to be obtained. Every parish contains vast reserves of lay ability which we have hardly begun to mobilize. Among the congregations that throng our churches for Sunday Mass are many who are extremely capable and who have made notable advances in their careers. Their interest in the apostolate must be captured from the pulpit. Vague exhortations or periodic scoldings will not win them. They require a definite campaign with which they can cooperate and detailed instructions as to their duties. By far, their most valuable contribution can be the recruiting of members for the parish convert class. Indeed, no inquiry class should ever open until it has been announced on three preceding Sundays, and appropriate sermons given on the apostolic duties of the laity.

The lowliest and even the careless Catholic, as well as the devout and the influential, will be in touch with non-Catholics of good will. Moreover, by seeking out candidates for instruction the indifferent Catholic may become more fervent himself. Hence our exhortations and instructions on the lay apostolate must be addressed to every last worshipper in our congregations. A special appeal should be made to converts themselves. Being more familiar with the difficulties encountered by a non-Catholic in the quest for truth, and having a large number of non-Catholic friends, they are usually notably successful in securing inquirers.

5.

Specialized Techniques

RELIGIOUS CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

Street preaching campaigns in rural Missouri attracted many non-Catholics, but the subsequent mailing of Catholic literature did not always sustain that interest. Experiments with a correspondence course in the Catholic religion proved so immensely more successful that Father Lester J. Fallon, C.M., perfected and vastly enlarged the scope of this approach.

This form of instruction appealed to a variety of persons: those in isolated areas, the deaf, mothers with large families or small children, people with irregular working hours, salesmen and theatrical people, inmates of institutions and servicemen. It also served to help the timid, the mildly curious and others who preferred not to apply for oral instruction.

Notices in the Catholic press publicized the series, and the 36,000 servicemen who took the course during the war made it known the world over. The Knights of Columbus, by advertising campaigns utilizing the most widely distributed secular periodicals, continued to attract applicants. Bishop Noll's *"Father Smith Instructs Jackson."* is the basic text, with six simple tests. Letters accompany the corrected tests with additional information or elucidation of difficult points. While the bulk of this correspondence is cleared through Father Fallon at the Confraternity Home Study Service, 4422 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis 8, Mo., numerous seminaries and many individual parishes have adopted this plan on a smaller scale. Father Fallon has a chapter in *Winning Converts,* edited by Dr. John A. O'Brien, and tells the whole encouraging story for those who are interested.

THE CATHOLIC INFORMATION CENTER

In the year 1948, exactly 12,928 inquirers utilized the facilities of The Paulist Information Center in New York City. Little wonder that these bureaus of Catholic information are rapidly multiplying. Many non-Catholics are intimidated by our rectories and harbor some uneasiness about making a direct approach to the Catholic clergy. The information center, however, is inviting, accessible and informal. It is usually a converted store on a busy thoroughfare, presenting attractive window displays and offering a clear view of a public reading room. However shy or self-conscious, visitors experience no strain by entering; they glance at the Catholic periodicals or consult the books or pamphlets, and are led to exchange a few words with the lay receptionist. On a subsequent visit they ask a question, meet one of the priests, and many eventually agree to take a formal course of instruction.

Local conditions affect the details of operation in different communities. Usually, one of the priests and one or another of the volunteer lay receptionists are available from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M. Two courses of group-instruction are continuously in progress, one at 5:15 P.M., the other at 8. The advantages of the center are publicized by window displays, and advertisements in the secular and diocesan papers. Talks to Catholic Societies and at Mass in the various parishes enlist the aid of the Catholic laity, who pass on this intelligence to interested non-Catholics. For an excellent treatment of this apostolate see: The Paulist Information Center in Boston, by Rev. John B. Sheerin, C.S.P., *The American Ecclesiastical Review,* October, 1947.

TRAILER CHAPELS

"A church and rectory on wheels" is the way one missioner describes his mobile unit. It is a Catholic church in miniature, displaying all the sacred, grace-giving objects so familiar to Catholics but totally alien and misunderstood by the non-Catholics of the outlying districts. And it provides portable living quarters for two priests, enabling them to penetrate isolated areas and to remain as long as they judge advisable. Within a period of two years after a trailer mission in the Ozarks, the Paulists baptized thirty members of one family!

A trailer missioner needs to be cook, mechanic, movie exhibitor, public-relations expert—and an apostle. Previous to the mission, notices are sent to Post Office box-holders of the district. On arrival, a site is chosen and all equipment is arranged and tested. Each evening, a series of secular and religious records are played over the public address system, and movie shorts are shown as the crowd gathers. A few prayers, an instruction or question-box period, and a sermon, constitute the service. Often, a section of the movie: "The King of Kings" is shown, with a commentary by one of the missioners. After services (and through the day) the priests meet the people, answer their questions, and endeavor to form an inquiry class; and arrangements are made to send *Our Sunday Visitor* or a correspondence course to those who are interested.

Trailer chapels have been employed from upper New York to Oregon by the Vincentians, Paulists, Redemptorists, Dominicans, Trinitarians, Josephites and Glendale Missioners, as well as by diocesan priests of Raleigh, Richmond, Mobile, and Oklahoma City-Tulsa. "Trailer Missions" by Very Rev. James F. Cunningham, C.S.P., a veteran in this apostolate, now Superior General of the Paulists, is an excellent treatment of this technique, and is one of the chapters in *Winning Converts,* edited by Dr. John A. O'Brien.

LECTURES FOR NON-CATHOLICS

Missions for non-Catholics have been given by numerous diocesan mission bands and missionaries representing nearly all the prominent orders. Recent missions for non-Catholics like those conducted by my confreres for the Carmelites in the Bronx, the Jesuits in Milwaukee, and at the Cathedral in Springfield, Mass., demonstrate that these missions can still attract a crowded church and a large class of fervent catechumens.

Best results are achieved when the local pastor, missionaries and the Catholic laity cooperate zealously and prayerfully. It helps if the local pastor is favorably known to the non-Catholics of his community as being friendly and easily accessible, sympathetic towards all their problems, and eager to explain Catholic beliefs to individuals or groups. Some pastors arrange a week's lectures for non-Catholics to follow the customary parochial mission for Catholics. Others prefer an open forum, a regular monthly lecture, or special services for non-Catholics during the Church Unity Octave, the Pentecost Novena, or during Lent.

The Paulists in recent years have had most gratifying results from the use of the Dialogue Mission for non-Catholics. One priest, after giving a comprehensive resumé of some Catholic doctrine, then answers a series of questions and objections prevalent among non-Catholics which are presented by a second priest in another pulpit. Aside from other advantages, the Dialogue provides the element of novelty that persuades many of our Separated Brethren to enter a Catholic church.

A crusade of prayer should precede and accompany these missions or courses. And widespread publicity is indispensable. Repeated pulpit announcements, advertisements in the press, leaflets, signs, posters, and other available means should be sedulously employed. The parochial census cards can be consulted and personal invitations sent to the non-Catholic partner of all mixed-marriages. Some non-Catholics will come of their own accord, but most of them will require a cordial personal invitation of a Catholic relative or friend, who ought to accompany them to the services. Attendance always increases where neighboring Catholic parishes lend their cooperation. Local Catholic lay organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Daughters, and the Legion of Mary, can give inestimable aid. In addition to inviting and accompanying non-Catholics, they sometimes provide additional publicity, pamphlets for free distribution, and radio time.

It is advisable for missionaries to be at the door of the church after services, to help non-Catholics select suitable reading matter and to meet and converse with interested inquirers. This personal conference is to the non-Catholic mission what the confessional is to the Catholic mission: here is where we garner the fruits of our efforts. Missionaries may then arrange for longer personal interviews and recruit members for the Inquiry Class which usually meets a half hour before each service. This class is continued by the local clergy when the mission is over. Rev. Bertrand L. Conway, C.S.P., the priest most prominently identified with these missions, is credited with having helped over 4,000 American converts to the Faith by this means. His Chapter in *The White Harvest,* edited by Dr. John A. O'Brien, is still required reading on this topic.

STREET PREACHING

Advocates of Street Preaching contend that if the man-in-the-

street will not come to church, we should talk to him out-of-doors. David Goldstein and Martha Moore Avery, pioneers in this technique, began in Boston in 1917. Mr. Goldstein later journeyed through 31 states, addressing vast crowds from the back of his auto, and won fairly general acceptance for this apostolate in the United States.

June of 1948 marked the Fifteenth National Conference of the Catholic Evidence Guild, which was held at Indianapolis. Delegates represented Guilds from Buffalo, Philadelphia, New York, Washington, Kansas City, Mo., Tulsa, Waterbury, New Orleans, Cincinnati and Indianapolis. For the past four years, some 50 diocesan and religious priests have participated in the National Street Preaching Institute for Priests.

The Guilds have not been idle. The Washington, D. C. Guild in 1940, its banner year, held 121 two-hour "pitches," and eight laymen, nine laywomen, 50 seminarians and 28 priests participated. A total of 485 speaking assignments were recorded with approximately 7,000 non-Catholics and 1,700 Catholics in attendance. Worthy of note is the fact that in 1946 no less than 70 priests engaged in a diocesan-wide street preaching campaign in Kansas City, Mo.

Most American crowds are sincere, fair and interested in religion, even when they are not church-goers; and a Catholic street speaker, in a well chosen place, will usually get a hearing. The curious, the perplexed, the disconsolate, sinners, people hungry for religious truth, and even the occasional bigot—will all tarry to listen. Meetings usually last for two hours, with two 15 minute talks and two 45 minute quiz periods.

The Catholic Evidence Bureau of the National Council of Catholic Men, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D. C., has furthered the Guild Movement and serves as a clearing house for information.

CONVERT CLUBS

"I was received into the Church over twenty years ago," said one convert, "and I'm still taking instructions." In one sense, conversion marks the end of a journey; but in another sense it may well be regarded as only the beginning of a new life. It is no secret among convert-makers that while most of our converts soon find them-

selves at home in the Church, there are others who either remain isolated, or do not grow to full Christian maturity, or who join the ranks of the careless—even when they do not drift from the Church. After Baptism, the convert has much to learn about the teachings of the Church, must acquire facility in the practice of Catholicism and should gradually come to conduct himself as a Catholic "to the manner born." After all, the convert is expected to take his place beside "cradle" Catholics who have to their advantage years of religious education. To negotiate this critical period successfully and to adjust himself to his new surroundings, he needs advice, encouragement and patient coaching.

Convert clubs or guilds are one of the best answers to this need. They usually provide a judicious balance of educational and social activities designed to help the convert's religious development, to channel his enthusiasm into zealous projects, and to offer companionship and sociability. *A Club for Converts,* written by Rev. Leonard B. Nienaber, is an excellent brochure on the necessity and manner of organizing and conducting a convert guild. It may be obtained from the author at 501 West Short St., Lexington 13, Ky.

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Types of Inquirers and their Difficulties

Inquirers, like medical patients, suffer from various spiritual and religious maladies. The more accurately we diagnose their condition the greater the assistance we can render them. Much can be gleaned from the type of questions they ask and the difficulties they present, as well as any direct information they volunteer. Adequate knowledge of the neophyte will emerge only gradually, as even the most expansive individual may evercise reserve concerning his deeper religious feelings and convictions. Consequently, the art of putting people at ease and persuading them to talk without constraint should be one of the conscious aims of the instructor. Though no two inquirers are identical, it is possible to recognize certain definite family trees among them. And it is particularly helpful for the convert-maker in our country to be familiar with three outstanding types: The Protestant, the Skeptic, and the un-Churched.

There are manifold tendencies within Protestantism that deserve greater attention than we usually accord them. But the most significant fact to be established regarding a Protestant inquirer is whether he belongs to the Liberal or Conservative wing. Formerly the various denominations represented fairly well-defined doctrinal positions, which were held more or less tenaciously, and by which they could be distinguished one from another. But this is much less frequently the case today.

In our day, a Liberal Baptist and a Liberal Presbyterian will have much more in common than either of them will have with a Conservative of his own denomination.[1] This condition arose principally from the manner in which two types of Protestants, in practically all the denominations, met the challenge of modern secularism. The Conservative (or Fundamentalist) took refuge in a denial of many indisputable conclusions and achievements of science, and in an excessively literal interpretation of Sacred Scripture. The Liberal (or Modernist), while retaining an attachment for Christianity, was overawed, not merely by the solid accomplishments of secular learning, but also by its unjustifiable arrogance. Pitiably anxious to make Christ's religion somehow acceptable to an age of unbelief, he was prepared to make concessions and disastrous retreats from fundamental doctrinal positions.

The Protestant with a Conservative background is apt to honor such beliefs as a Personal God, Original Sin, the Divinity of Christ, the Redemption, the duty of church membership and worship, the need of Grace, the Ten Commandments, and Judgment, Heaven and Hell. These truths he is likely to accept in the manner currently proposed by most Fundamentalist, Bible-loving Protestants. In all likelihood he will also possess many ancient Protestant misunderstandings and prejudices regarding the Pope, Confession, Purgatory, Indulgences, and the like.

The Liberal Protestant, sometimes without full realization, may harbor the basic difficulties of the Skeptic. He tends to question the supernatural; he balks at miracles and mysteries; and he waters down the content of revelation even when he doesn't deny it out of hand. His idea of God bears little relation to that of his forebears;

1. James Gordon Gilkey, *A Faith to Affirm*, p. VII.

man, for him, is not a fallen creature desperately requiring redemption, but a self-sufficient being in need of better education and wider opportunity. The Liberal respects Christ as the very highest expression of truth, goodness and beauty, but not as God's only Begotten Son. His ultimate test is inner religious experience, not the objective facts of the Gospel or the direct teachings of Christ. Liberal Protestants are sometimes contrite for the numerous abject surrenders they made. But their subservience to the age has destroyed many of the traditional beliefs of numerous outstanding ministers and influential Protestant laymen.[2]

Apart from purely doctrinal difficulties, the line of attack pursued by some Protestants today is that described by Paul Blanshard in his recent bigoted book, *American Freedom and Catholic Power.* These critics regard the Church as the instrument of a clerical fascism determined to impose an alien culture on the nation, in order to further the political, social and economic policies of the Hierarchy. Because of the notoriety given these views in the press, many sincere non-Catholics are profoundly disturbed. The convert-maker cannot afford to ignore these questions since they obscure the various attractions Catholicism otherwise holds for many of our fellow citizens.

THE SKEPTIC

Some inquirers will say, "I have no religion whatsoever." Though in the minority, this group is perhaps more numerous than at any time in our nation's history. They are to be found among all classes, but are conspicuously evident among the better educated and within the professions. The precise philosophical divisions into which they fall are not nearly so important to the convert-maker as their basic attitude towards religion.[3]

Some are militant in their unbelief. These men regard religion as an organized superstition towards which they are openly contemptuous, and they are more or less actively anti-religious. Others are reluctant Skeptics. They have a deep regard for the many values they recognize in religion; they treat religious questions with respect; and many of them wish that they could believe. Neither type is spiritually hopeless, though the former is a sore trial to our patience. The Catholic Church is the spiritual home of all men,

2. Wilbur M. Smith, *Therefore, Stand,* pp. 1-137.
3. The Approach To the Skeptic, *Essays of A Catholic, Hilaire Belloc,* p. 49.

and both classes have provided us with many notable converts. In the main, they are likely to approach us with three fundamental difficulties:

(1) They assume that the only valid knowledge we possess is that derived from the techniques of the laboratory. Before we convince them of the existence of God, we must usually persuade them of the limitations of physical science and re-establish in them a respect for philosophy.

(2) They assume that the idea of a beneficient God is irreconcilable with the pain of the world. Knowing little of the wisdom of the Cross, they are emotionally overwrought and intellectually baffled by the prevalence of disease, death, poverty, ignorance, cruelty and injustice.

(3) They dislike many phases of the Protestantism in which many of them were reared and assume, without adequate investigation, that Catholicism has nothing better to offer.

THE UN-CHURCHED

"I suppose I am a Christian, but I seldom go to any church. I have not been to church in years." People who make this remark constitute the vast majority of our countrymen. And it is this group which must be attracted and won if we are to make substantial headway in the conversion of our country.[4]

These people are the unsuspecting victims of secularism which, in the United States, regards religion as more or less irrelevant and simply crowds it off the main roads of life and thought. They usually respect religion, and enjoy going to church for weddings, funerals and for the Christmas and Easter services. They are apt to pray in times of dire emergency. It is not often that they consciously reject religion, but have suffered a gradual erosion of faith by their prolonged and widespread neglect of the claims of the spirit. They have been preserved from the worst consequences of secularism by the tenacity of the Christian tradition. They believe in God—but vaguely. They feel that death is not total extinction. They honor Christ; but they have forgotten that He is Divine, and that He established the Kingdom of God on earth with objective truth, eternal law, and with the channels of His abounding grace. They

4. The Possibility of a Religious Revival, Frank Sheed, *Techniques for Convert-Makers,* April, 1947.

retain many of the basic moral decencies but have little sense of a fixed standard of morality. Our greatest task is to awaken their interest in religion; to persuade them that it matters enormously; and that it is an absolute necessity more insistent than our need for bread.

* * * * * *

Is there a return to religion? Certainly not in the sense that legions of men are now trouping back to organized religion. But it is abundantly manifest that men everywhere are increasingly disillusioned with the world irreligion has made. Like the Prodigal Son, some of them are thoroughly disgusted with the empty husks so long served them; others are consciously or unconsciously seeking a road back to their Father's house; and many have struggled, in pain and humiliation, to the very gate of their ancient family dwelling: The Catholic Church.

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Study Outline

GERALD C. TREACY, S.J.

The Church is confronted with a major mission problem in the United States. We may place the problem under four headings. First, out of a population of 140,000,000, the Catholics number 26,000,000. Second, more than half our fellow citizens do not attend any church. Third, faced with this evidence of religious ignorance, indifference or unbelief, we are gaining some 117,000 converts annually. Fourth, many priests who are close to the problem claim that the leakage more than offsets our converison claims.

In one-third of the counties that make up this nation there is no resident priest. While conditions are more encouraging in our metropolitan areas, they still call for missionary zeal, for there is scarcely a parish without its quota of modern pagans and lapsed Catholics.

Zeal for the convert apostolate is increasing among priests and seminarians. This is a cheerful omen and will hasten the day when America will be Catholic. Another consoling truth is that aside from our supernatural resources, we have enormous natural resources. We have 15,000 centrally located parishes, 42,000 priests, and 26,000,000 loyal lay people. Besides, our labors are among people whose language and culture we share, who are fair-minded and who have unsuspected depths of latent religion even though members of no church.

Conversion is both a divine mystery and a practical problem. As a practical problem it calls for high intelligence on the part of the worker in the vineyard. We must remember that the great missionary saints were skilled technicians. A blundering and inept approach to individuals or to a nation might bring failure to a great cause.

It is a cheering fact that our clergy are coming to regard convert work as part of their everyday apostolate. And with this growing concern for converts there goes a desire to learn and apply the most approved methods of winning men to Christ's Church.

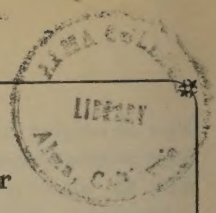
Before large-scale conversions take place in America the clergy must establish friendly contact and cordial relations with as many non-Catholics as they can. Besides individual contacts they must try to make group contacts through the various service associations to which they belong.

Questions

What are the four elements that constitute our American mission problem? How many American counties are without a resident priest?

Questions

What are religious conditions in our metropolitan areas?
What does the Code of Canon Law say about non-Catholics?
What are our natural resources which are favorable to the conversion of America?
What is the present mood of many non-Catholic Americans?
Conversion is both a divine mystery and a practical problem. Explain.
What do the great missionary saints teach us?
How are our clergy coming to regard convert work?
What must our clergy do before large-scale conversions take place in America?
What did Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi say of mixed marriages?
How may large groups of non-Catholics be reached?
How may we influence non-Catholics at our services?
Give some examples of the direct approach to prospective converts.
What is the value of the radio in convert work?
How may the printed word be used in convert work?
Enumerate the advantages of the inquiry class.
What is the technique in launching such a class?
How much does the average Catholic do to win converts?
Cite some reasons for the inaction of the laity.
Explain the personal apostolate.
Give the five points in the technique of the personal apostolate.
What must pervade our entire approach to non-Catholics?
Give the plan for enlisting the laity in the convert apostolate.
What has been the success of religious correspondence courses?
Enumerate the advantages of the information center.
What is the trailer chapel?
What are the qualifications of a trailer missioner?
How does the trailer missioner conduct services?
What has been the success of missions for non-Catholics?
Explain the Dialogue Mission for non-Catholics.
Describe the development of street preaching and the Catholic Evidence Guilds.
What is the object of convert clubs or guilds?
Enumerate the three types of modern inquirers.
Explain the difference between Liberal and Conservative Protestants.
What is the attitude of Skeptics toward religion?
What are their three fundamental difficulties?
Describe the attitude of the un-Churched.



A Note on the Author

The Rev. John T. McGinn, C.S.P., of New York, was ordained in 1928 after completing studies at St. Paul's College, the Sulpician Seminary in Washington and at the Catholic University of America. He has been engaged in convert-making activities throughout Canada and the United States, which included: Missions in churches and halls, motor chapel missions, street preaching and radio broadcasts. He is a frequent contributor to clerical periodicals on the Apostolate to non-Catholics. Since 1943 he has taught Missiology to the Paulist seminarians. He also conducts a course in convert-making at the Apostolic Mission House of St. Paul's College for priests and seminarians on the campus of the Catholic University, and lectures once a week to the deacons at St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, on the instruction of converts. He is director of The Paulist League for which he edits *The Paulist News* and *Techniques for Convert-Makers*. He is also Consultor and General Secretary of the Paulist Fathers.

The study outline and questions for "French Missions in North America," were formulated by Gerald C. Treacy, S.J., who has prepared study club editions of various encyclicals.

The authors of the various studies of the Missionary Academia express their own views, which are necessarily independent of the National Council of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith.